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REUNION AT THE NURSERY SCHOOL

A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, April 7, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associate radio stations.

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Thank you, Bob Brown--

WALLACE KADDERLY:

Here we are in Washington, with signs of spring all about us despite the cold breath coming from that snow to the north and west of us. The green of the willows along the Potomac - - - the narcissus in bloom in the parks - - - and Ruth Van Deman with apple blossoms pinned to her jacket - - - all ready to report on some of the studies the Bureau of Home Economics is making in cooperation with the National Child Research Center. Ruth Van Deman - - -

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Thank you, Wallace. But for real signs of spring, you should go up to the Research Center one of these fine sunny days. You'd find the yard sprinkled with children - - - picking violets near the lilac bush - - - building houses under the trees - - - and down at the swings in the hollow below the barn.

KADDERLY:

The barn - - - they have a real barn?

VAN DEMAN:

It used to be, before they made it over into a kindergarten for the youngsters too old for nursery school and too young for the first grade. The post-graduate department of the nursery school, you might call it now.

KADDERLY:

Post graduates! You'll be calling them alumni next - - -

VAN DEMAN:

They did have a reunion up there the other day - - - as a matter of fact - - - to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the school. All the old grads came back.

KADDERLY:

Old grads - - - about 12 or 14 years old. But go ahead with the story.

VAN DEMAN:

The oldest are in junior high school now. But they know the technique of reunions already - - - reception committee, games, costumes - - - that is paper caps and badges. The badges were the symbols they had in nursery school to mark their belongings before they learned to read their own names - - - a bird, a dog, a flower, and so on. They'd drawn them on big pieces of cardboard and hung them around their necks - - - very amusing.

(over)

KADDERLY:

Sounds like some of the things we do at college reunions.

VAN DEMAN:

Exactly. And there were contests - - - one a spinach eating contest. And they gave prizes for the best compositions on "What I remember about nursery school". I asked for a copy of the one that got first prize. It's written by a boy 10 years old - - - David Pritchard - - - and I want to read part of it: "We had our noses and throats looked at every morning for colds". (Several of the children mentioned the daily health inspection in what they wrote. Of course that's part of the routine in every well-run nursery school.)

And quoting again:

"One day we were at lunch a child cried over carrots because he did not like them. I thought it was very odd to cry over carrots because they are good". (Of course the rule in nursery school is to eat what's put on the plate, unless there's a valid reason for not.) But here's about the best. Quotes. "The kitchen always had a nice smell in it". Which certainly speaks well for the housekeeping at the school. And here's something else which shows what an impression these early surroundings leave: "The music room had a dull mellow light. It still has the picture of Changing the Guard at Buckingham Palace. We sang Now the day is Over and we sang about the sailboats".

(But don't think they are always angels.) (Quote) "One day a boy threw some shoes at me and I returned the fire. I landed a good sock on him."

There's a lot more about play and making gardens and so on, but David finished his composition with: "I had a good time at nursery school."

KADDERLY:

Well, that's a very good reporting job for a 10 year old. - - - Now tell us about some of the studies your bureau has carried on at this center. And, by the way, who keeps this school going?

VAN DEMAN:

It's run by the parents, and supported largely by tuition fees. Occasionally there are small grants. One makes it possible for a physically handicapped child to attend each year. In general, this school's typical of those in many places all over the country. In 1936 the Office of Education reported there were 285 nursery schools in the United States. That is not counting the ones organized under emergency funds. I understand there were about 1500 of those emergency schools last November. But getting back to your question about our research. In order to work out standards for diets for young children, you have to have accurate records of what normal, healthy children are eating. So for a number of years now the teachers at the center have kept records for us of what each child ate every day. We analyzed these figures on quantities of foods into terms of food nutrients - - - that is, into calcium, iron, protein, vitamins, and so on. Just the standard procedure with data of that kind. The report is now being printed and will become a part of the permanent record of food requirements of children from two to six years old.

KADDERLY:

A strictly scientific type of report.

VAN DEMAN:

Absolutely. But the people at the nursery school have also helped us work out pattern menus and recipes for noon meals for nursery school groups. They're in quantities for 25 children and 6 teachers. A great many nursery school teachers who don't have a trained dietitian to consult with, have written to us for these menus and recipes to use as a general guide.

KADDERLY:

And those are still available?

VAN DEMAN:

To nursery school teachers, yes, and anybody who's planning and cooking meals for that kind of a group. By the way, Tuesday when I was up at the Research Center, I had a chance to see the children at lunch. The first course that day was egg souffle - - - a mixture of beaten-up eggs and milk and bread crumbs baked in big pans until it was brown and puffy - - - and with the souffle, green snap beans.

KADDERLY:

A good combination.

VAN DEMAN:

The children seemed to think so - - - the way the food disappeared. No fuss, no urging, even with those less than two years old. And they put on their own bibs. (I was very much interested to see that the bibs were made by the self-help design Clarice Scott shows in our bulletin on children's clothing.)

Every day it seems the teacher in charge of each table appoints one of the children to do the serving. So that youngster marches over to the serving table and brings the plates of food, one by one, to the other children and the teacher.

And when the meal is over they take their empty plates back to the center table, and put their spoons on a small tray, ready to go back to the kitchen to be washed. I overheard two strapping boys, who were finishing their second serving of cocoa pudding, boasting that they hadn't spilled a drop on their shirt fronts or the table.

KADDERLY:

I take it muscular coordination and independence are part of the nursery school curriculum.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, but taught in very natural, informal ways. I was struck by the calm quiet atmosphere all through the school. I think you'd be interested in going up some day to observe yourself.

KADDERLY:

I should, very much.

VAN DEMAN:

And reverting to signs of spring, I have a little poem here that was printed once in Child Welfare - - - the magazine of the Parent-Teacher Association. It will only take a minute to read it.

KADDERLY:

Go ahead - - - Bob Brown and the Homesteaders will be delighted to be reminded again -- that this is spring, after all --

VAN DEMAN:

"These are a mother's signs of spring:
A top sent spinning from a string;
Bats and balls and stolen bases;
Coats left in forgotten places;
Grimy knuckles, and holes in knees
Of knickers; glassies, agates, and pewees;
Camping kits and blanket rolls;
Cans of bait and fishing poles;
Flying kites against the sky;
Swingers letting the old cat die;
Jackstones, too, and a bouncing ball;
Unheard; unheeded supper call;
Aching limbs when the long day closes;
Tousled heads, and freckled noses."

KADDERLY:

Ruth, another poem like that and you'll have me down with a bad case of spring fever* - - despite the chill in the air.

VAN DEMAN:

Or playing hookey.

KADDERLY:

Maybe.- - - But first I'd like to check the title and number of that bulletin for nursery school teachers you mentioned.

VAN DEMAN:

"Menus and Recipes for Lunches at School" - - - never mind about the number. And besides the suggestions for nursery school meals it has material on hot lunches for grade school children in quantity for 50 children.

KADDERLY:

All right then. "Menus and Recipes for Lunches at School". Any teacher who wants a copy send a card to Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. And we'll be looking for you again next Thursday.

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